
TUNING the Instruments of NATIONAL POWER

By HANS BINNENDIJK and PATRICK L. CLAWSON

There has been a marked realignment since the end of the Cold War of the instruments of national power which are available to the United States in pursuing its interests around the world. Because of resource constraints and new threats, some former mainstays of defense and foreign policy—such as strategic nuclear forces and foreign aid—are less central today. At the same time, the U.S. Government is developing new techniques to deal with changing circumstances which rely more on coalition partners, high technology, the private sector, and additional roles for the Armed Forces.

The Strategic Setting

In the modern world, the changes related to geostrategy, information, and government are so sweeping that they may be regarded as revolutions. One common characteristic of these changes is that they are transforming the world into a more fast-paced and diverse place in which a more tailored and coordinated approach to policymaking is required. They also increase the means that are available to the United States in exercising its power and influence.

Geostrategy. The most apparent multidimensional changes are geostrategic. In the area of relations among major powers—long the focus of world politics—superpower confrontation was replaced by cooperation in the initial rush of enthusiasm after the Cold War. Now relations with

Russia and China are somewhat cooler as they resist further reform and seek to strengthen their international position. Among the powers, the United States is by far the strongest. Nevertheless the world has not become unipolar as some predicted a few years ago.

Another aspect of the geostrategic scene has been the triumph of market democracy. While not always practiced, it is nearly universally regarded as the model approach. From this vantage states can be divided into three groups: those successful at implementing market democracy, those in transition from authoritarianism towards that goal, and troubled states that fall behind the rest of the world while often struggling against ethnic or religious extremism. The most likely sources of conflict are troubled and transitional states. Some rogues may divert attention from their domestic ills by external aggression aimed at imposing regional hegemony. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), particularly nuclear

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Marine anti-terrorism team during Valiant Thunder '95.

U.S. Navy (Lou Caporaletti)

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arms, makes confrontations with rogues especially dangerous. Conflicts are likely in troubled states, and in some cases they will fail—ceasing to function and degenerating into societal chaos. Though the United States will not always intervene, it has developed capabilities to conduct humanitarian and peace operations when they are required.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the geostrategic scene is the explosion of transnational problems that do not stem from the policies of governments. International crime, terrorism, mass migration, and environmental threats transcend national boundaries and often are not susceptible to traditional tools of statecraft designed for relations among sovereign states.

Information Technology. Advances in information technology are increasing tenfold every five years. Computers, facsimile machines, fiber optics, satellites, and the like speed information across frontiers, reinforcing political trends toward open societies. No one can foretell how this technology will alter traditional means of national power, but certain useful themes are emerging. One is that access to technology is a prerequisite for economic growth, at least in developed states. Another is that the ubiquity of

global communication is creating new avenues for American values, culture, and interests to radiate overseas and vice versa. Still another is that information is perhaps the single most important factor in deciding the outcome on the battlefield.

The Nature of Government. After an era of increasing state activity, central governments are in retreat. Power is devolving as more control is ceded to the regional or local level. Central governments are shedding functions, in part to cut budget deficits. Governments are privatizing state-owned enterprises, relying on markets to boost growth, and the power of international firms has grown. Moreover, less concern is directed to projecting power overseas and more at domestic issues, especially the economy. In many countries the argument is made that a strong economy is the only means of sustaining an active international role.

In the United States, domestic concerns have caused a decline in resources which support defense and foreign programs. From FY85 to FY95, funding for defense fell 34 percent in real terms, and funding for international programs fell 46 percent. Administration and congressional mid-1995 projections for defense and international spending both showed a continued reduction in real terms from 1996 to 2000. For defense they agreed on a 7 percent reduction. For international programs the White House projects a 23 percent cut while the concurrent budget resolution projects a 43 percent cut. Furthermore, pressure to

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balance the budget while protecting domestic programs may push reductions for defense above the levels projected in mid-1995 by the administration or Congress. The lower resource levels will pose a serious challenge for exerting our influence over a range of issues and at a level of leadership that U.S. interests require and that Americans expect.

Impact of the Revolutions. While the basic characteristics of the present strategic environment are uncertainty and change, historical experience suggests that the new world system may be more malleable now than it will be in a few years. International systems have typically had a life cycle in which relations among the major powers start out flexible then become more rigid. The way the system is shaped tends to determine whether these powers remain at peace. If that analogy holds, then there is an urgency to resolving the domestic debate on what the United States wants from the new world order and maximizing the instruments of power available to policymakers.

Although changes in the instruments of power have generally been driven by developments in the international environment—revolu-

tions in geostrategy, information technology, and the nature of government—much is the result of conscious decisions made in Washington. The United States is reinventing the ways in which it operates in order to reduce costs, taking advantage of changing circumstances to shed functions and institutions that are no longer needed while making

greater use of new opportunities. As reinvention continues the challenge will be to make more effective use of varied instruments which the United States has at its disposal. These instruments can be grouped into three general categories: non-military, political military, and military.

Non-Military Instruments

Diplomacy. The nature and tools of diplomacy are changing rapidly. In the more fluid situation of the 1990s, negotiations are shifting from formal to ad hoc arrangements. Attention is being given to merging elements of a diplomatic structure which was created for a different age. Global affairs have been given new prominence at the State Department. Our embassies abroad are less the province of the State Department and more a site of interagency functions under the looser leadership of the ambassador. And as the loss of

three colleagues in Bosnia attests, the life of the diplomat is becoming increasingly dangerous.

Information. American Cold War ideology—marked by emphasis on freedom, democracy, and marketplace—has triumphed, although it has not been fully practiced in transitional or troubled states. Public diplomacy is therefore evolving from the battle over hearts and minds to campaigns to persuade foreign governments and publics to support specific national policies. In this effort the U.S. Information Agency plays the principal role, presenting our perspective to a world saturated by commercially produced information and supplementing it, as required, with government assets.

Nonstate Actors. The United States uses international and private voluntary organizations more often today and in more ways than during the Cold War. The military works more directly with them, requiring both sides to adapt, given the obvious differences in their respective cultures (such as command structures versus webs of independent actors that rely on consensus-building). The government not only uses international organizations in responding to disasters and the effects of ethnic strife, but in mitigating the threat to vital national interests from rogue states.

Economics. As in other fields, the trend in economic affairs is away from the commitment of budget resources. Foreign aid is shifting from direct bilateral budget assistance to new ways of mobilizing multilateral resources for vital national interests; for example, creation of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization. But the larger story is that as security threats have declined, the Nation has used existing economic instruments (such as trade retaliation) vigorously against its allies, which may endanger alliances in the long term. But often economic instruments have little impact, in part because the United States does not commit sufficient resources to make instruments such as foreign aid effective. In other cases the collateral impact of these instruments is too great; that is, they have broad consequences that inflict unacceptable political damage, such as when the threat to withdraw China's most-favored nation status resulted in a deterioration of relations across the board. When America is prepared to inflict heavy collateral damage, a coercive economic tool such as sanctions can have a discernible effect. Witness how sanctions weakened Baghdad's ability to threaten its neighbors and Belgrade's support to ethnic Serb forces in Bosnia.



Combat Camera Imagery (Vette Walden)

The Chairman and Ambassador Albright in Croatia.

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Intelligence. As the focus of national security policy shifted away from the Soviet Union, intelligence activities have been diffused. The debate continues about what intelligence is needed and which areas are appropriate for analysis. For instance, ethical and methodological questions have arisen over the collection and dissemination of economic intelligence on U.S. allies. In those areas where policymakers want intelligence, the information explosion has yielded vast amounts of open-source data. Some have estimated that 80 percent of the information used by the intelligence community is now derived from open sources. Policymakers are likely to get their first report of fast-breaking events from CNN. The intelligence community is accordingly devoting attention to what consumers want and how to package and deliver that information quickly. Greater priority is being given to analysis of the large flow of available information, and less to collecting it.

Political-Military Instruments

Productivity and Technology. Little attention is given today to industrial mobilization and maintaining an engineering lead (such as jet engines or armor). That results partly from changes in political environment, but perhaps more from the priority given to information technology instead of metal industries. Contrary to concerns that productivity and technological power are in decline, the United States is the leader in information technology, especially in the critical area of software. America's technological base along with its production capacity constitute as potent an instrument of national power as ever. To be sure, the way in which that power will be applied to defense production is changing. More cutting edge research is being done in the private sector and less by the government. As more money goes into electronics, and as the production of major weapons platforms shrinks, more collaboration among businesses, including foreign firms, will be required for the survival of core capabilities (such as building carriers and nuclear powered submarines).

Arms control. The agenda of arms control has shifted to the nonproliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons and missiles, building on the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Mutually reinforcing measures—nuclear-free zones, a comprehensive test ban treaty, and a fissile-material production-cutoff treaty—offer promise for strengthening non-proliferation. Meanwhile, conventional arms control models and confidence-building measures implemented with the former Warsaw Pact have relevance for

other strife-torn areas of the world. Despite this diversification of effort, Russia remains indispensable to arms control. Its support is vital to supplementing the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, solidifying the emerging system to control dangerous weapons and dual-use technology, and dismantling the legacy of nuclear arms, including the cooperative threat reduction program for greater security of nuclear material to forestall proliferation dangers.

Defense Engagement in Peacetime. Cold War interaction with foreign militaries other than alliance partners often meant providing developing countries with equipment at favorable prices, so as to shore up their ability to meet Soviet-inspired subversion or outright aggression. By contrast, the 1990s have seen a drop in arms deliveries, and a shift in the focus of defense engagement to interaction, such as professional education and combined military exercises, and high-level defense diplomacy, such as quasi-diplomatic trips by regional CINCs. This engagement has expanded to nearly every country in the world, including military-to-military contacts with governments leery of U.S. policies. But at the same time, there has been a decrease in the number of soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen with foreign-area expertise, as well as a reduction in forces which are likely to take part in foreign military interaction programs (such as engineers, military police, and medics). The challenge is to make better use of declining resources.

Security Relationships and Peacetime Deployment. The core of U.S. security policy in the Cold War was its alliances for collective defense against the external threat from the Soviet Union. The post-Cold War role of alliances is shifting as they become the political and military cornerstones of ad hoc coalitions. Such arrangements are the likely way the United States will fight in the foreseeable future. The NATO combined joint task force (CJTF) concept is the most telling example of the new role of alliances; but delays in implementing it illustrate the difficulty in re-directing Cold War institutions, even where there is clear military utility (in this case, for crisis response beyond NATO's borders). While alliances like NATO provide the military nucleus for an ad hoc coalition, there may well be political utility in including many states, even if some contribute little militarily. Coalitions that include uncertain partners require a delicate balance. Meanwhile, as force structure declines and support at home as well as in host countries for large overseas bases becomes more open to question, dependence on pre-positioned equipment ashore and afloat will

Oklahoma City,
April 21, 1995.



Air National Guard (Mark A. Moore)

continue to increase, and there may be a place for new approaches such as mobile offshore bases.

Humanitarian and Peace Operations. The typical peace operation in the past was patrolling a cease fire line. With the end of superpower rivalry peacekeeping operations have generally been focused on resolving conflicts within states rather than on cross-border aggression. Such missions are more complicated and controversial, as there is less control over armed elements and, in some cases, virtually no organized government to work with. The most critical elements to the success of complex peace operations can be the right mix of military and civilian agencies as well as private voluntary organizations, and properly coordinating their actions in the field. In more complicated settings, involvement can make the difference between success and failure because of the skills of the Armed Forces, from C³I to special operations forces (including civil affairs and psychological operations), and leadership and managerial abilities. While accepting its role, the Nation resists the assumption that it will automatically play a dominant part in every situation, instead preferring to concentrate on how to succeed with limited U.S. participation. The record of success is mixed at best in operations where no peace accord exists and the peace force is perceived to be

antagonistic toward one side. The task is to contain or end fighting while not becoming a party to the conflict or assuming responsibility for nation-building. The prognosis for expanded operations of this sort is uncertain. The United Nations admittedly lacks the capability to manage such missions, which means that they are likely to occur successfully only when Washington opts to lead a coalition.

Military Instruments

Unconventional Responses. U.S. interests may be challenged by indirect means such as terrorism, subversion, narcotics trafficking, and sudden flows of refugees. Some kinds of threats are useful ways for the weak to attack the strong. Lately, they have become more salient because of the demise of the Soviet Union and the trend toward a more open world economy and the freer movement of people. Ultimately, regional powers intent on systematically challenging our national interests may mount unconventional threats. Responses to them will include an enhanced role for law enforcement agencies. Unconventional military responses offer options to decisionmakers who are reluctant to resort to costly measures; and they can minimize collateral damage. However, unconventional instruments are politically sensitive.

Limited Military Intervention. In recent decades insurgencies were essentially ideological and the United States supported one side. Today insurgencies and civil wars are more often fought among ethnic groups, and the U.S. goal is peace between two sides, one of which is usually the internationally recognized government. While interethnic conflicts may become frequent events, Americans may not always support involvement in them, since they often occur in regions where geostrategic interests are slight, although challenges to our values (such as genocide) may be high. When the United States does become involved, its goals may be very limited. In light of the record of the United Nations, especially in Somalia and Bosnia, the decision to intervene will depend on the objectives, command and control, contributions by like-minded nations, and duration and cost.

Classical Military Power. While the United States is much more capable than any potential enemy, strategic assets such as airlift and sealift would be strained in the event of two nearly simultaneous major regional contingencies. Also, since the overseas presence of our ground and air forces was reduced by half between 1986 and 1995, there is less margin for error in deploying our remaining forces. And given that weapons systems last decades and relatively little is being procured, the Nation will be fielding equipment designed for use against the Soviet Union for the

Somali women
drawing water.



U.S. Navy (Joe Gawlowicz)

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foreseeable future and must adapt it to new types of warfare. Unless spending on procurement is accelerated, the military could face obsolescence of equipment in fifteen to twenty years. Perhaps more important than equipment is doctrine:

knowing how to fight. Each service has updated its doctrine during the past few years, and now the focus must shift to the development of more joint doctrine.

Emerging Military Instruments. Information technology offers the best opportunity for the Armed Forces to develop new instruments in the mid-term. But to benefit from these capabilities, through a military technological revolution, innovative operational concepts and organizations are required, namely, a revolution in military affairs. We are on the verge of integrating systems into what the Vice Chairman, Admiral William Owens, refers to as a *system of systems*. This super-system could see all key enemy assets on a battlefield (through “dominant battlefield knowledge”), communicate this information instantly to combat units, and strike with unprecedented accuracy. With insightful leadership and hard work this will provide a high degree of control over global security through a capability to intervene quickly, effectively, and economically. In some cases that intervention will be done by the Armed Forces directly, whereas in others it will be achieved by providing real-time intelligence, systems expertise, and software to our allies. One

caution: the effective use of emerging instruments requires protecting military information and other systems to avoid retaliation in cyberspace. Although there is considerable interest in information war, it is not clear how vulnerable potential adversaries may be, especially those that are not heavily dependent on modern computer technology. It is clear that we are vulnerable.

Countering WMD. The end of the Cold War was punctuated by new threats from regional powers. Rogue states with NBC capabilities are dangers that must be considered despite programs to prevent proliferation. Thus attention is being devoted to countering WMD. The first choice is deterrence, but that may be difficult to achieve regionally. A rogue with NBC capabilities may use them as weapons of choice, whereas previously that may have been a last resort. Moreover, it may not be credible to threaten a nuclear response against a chemical attack. Because of problems in deterring regional states, more emphasis is being put on defensive measures. Some are passive, like intelligence and NBC protection. Active defenses, such as theater high-altitude area defense, become more important as ballistic and cruise missiles become more widely available.

Some Conclusions

There has been an understandable tendency to put greater emphasis on domestic concerns of late, resulting in calls for cuts in the budgets of most instruments of national power, as well as for

reorganization or fundamental reform of many foreign policy institutions. Five conclusions can be drawn about applying U.S. power in this new environment.

New Ways of Applying Power. Enhancing our ability to exert influence abroad does not necessarily mean buying more of the same old thing. The national security establishment evolved largely out of the Cold War. New ways of doing business are being developed to draw on untapped strengths of existing organizations while shifting resources from areas that are no longer relevant. For instance, transnational threats are becoming

more critical relative to concerns over aggressive destabilizing states, which demands a greater role for Federal law enforcement agencies that have traditionally kept a relatively low profile abroad. Another ex-

ample is the information revolution in which technological innovation is driven by commercial capital rather than government investment. The military will no longer be the principal sponsor of technological innovation and, consequently, the Armed Forces face the challenge of adapting rapidly advancing commercial technologies.

Phasing Down Use of Some Instruments. As the United States diversifies its instruments, reliance on some that were central in the past is declining. For example, America is foregoing the capability to retaliate in kind against chemical or biological weapons, has drastically reduced its reliance on tactical nuclear weapons, and is dismantling much of its inventory of strategic arms. It has also effectively ended military aid (save to Israel and Egypt), other than minuscule amounts for education and training. The United States once carried out functions for which it no longer has adequate resources to have substantial impact. For instance, the government is no longer a key actor in international radio broadcasting and economic development, although it still funds some broadcasting (especially the Voice of America) and some foreign aid.

Working with the Private Sector. Government will need to rely more on the private sector in its conduct of national security policy. Voluntary organizations often provide humanitarian relief more effectively than governments. Sometimes an eminent private citizen can explore ideas with rogues, without the Nation extending legitimacy by direct contact. Businesses, acting out of self-interest and without governmental intervention, can often advance U.S. goals, as when investors stimulate economic growth that, in turn, reinforces market democracy or that cements a fragile

peace. As the private sector grows in former state-dominated economies, and American firms operate in a global market, the Nation has increasing opportunities to exert its influence. But there are limits. Firms doing business abroad cannot defend national interests. The pervasiveness of popular culture—music, sports, and designer names—and the strength of high-tech industries—computer software and aerospace—can contribute to national power, but it is not a basis for leadership in national security. Regardless of the extent to which economy and culture are globalized, traditional governmental activities remain key to defense and foreign affairs.

Applying Instruments to Limited Ends. Past competition with the Soviet Union meant that most international events involving U.S. interests came into play as part of a global chess game. In a multipolar world of uncertainty and ambiguity, the Nation is likely to be engaged to promote limited interests. Given the stakes, it may not be credible for Washington to threaten to use the full range of instruments at its disposal even if warranted. There will no doubt be cases when a small commitment may be made but without the public will to enlarge that commitment.

Coordinating Among Instruments. While coordinating government agencies has always been a problem, the challenge is growing for several reasons. During the Cold War, coordination among agencies and policy instruments was simplified by the overwhelming priority given to containing Soviet communism. In the post-Cold War era, there is less clarity about which goals are central and which are peripheral. And because a wider array of policy instruments is being used, there are more agencies among which policy has to be coordinated.

As foreign policy goals become more complex and a greater variety of instruments are brought to bear on any one problem, interagency coordination and clear policy direction become all the more important. Close coordination among agencies and consultation between the administration and Congress are potent force multipliers. To this end, attention is being given to drawing lessons from earlier complex crisis management efforts.

Despite resource constraints, the Nation has an impressive array of instruments of national power and influence that are being adapted to changing circumstances. While there may be defects in how the United States uses those instruments, it has succeeded in achieving many of its goals, and the efficiency of such capabilities continues to improve steadily. If the resources continue to be cut, however, this optimistic assessment could be reversed.

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